Nil Gilevich

BREAD AND MUSIC

Translated from the Byelorussian by Anisiya Prokofieva Edited by Ludmila Cortes

NIL GILEVICH, People′s Poet of Byelorussia, was born in 1931 in the village of Slaboda, in the Minsk region. He wrote several books of lyrics, collections of satire and humour and books for children. He lectures as a literary scholar and folklorist. He is the author of a series of works on folk art.

Nil Gilevich was born in 1931 in Slaboda, a village of the Minsk region. There he went to school and there, at the age of nine, he wrote his first poem. His works began to come out in print in 1946, when he was not yet sixteen.

Nil Gilevich graduated from the Minsk Teachers' Training College and, later, from the Philological Faculty of the Byelorussian State University; then he began to teach Byelorussian Literature. At the same time he took up the study of folklore.

Over a period of twenty-five years Nil Gilevich created poetry that has been published in more than twenty collections. His poetry reflects the feelings and yearnings of his people and his love for life and his native soil, with its lovely, serene nature; of these he writes:

"I love you, Life, I love you well and dearly..."

"My land Byelorussian so precious to me,
The hope and reliance of your son..."

and

"I stroll admiring your landscapes truly fine..."

The poet is very tender and deeply respectful when he writes about the industrious women of the Byelorussian village:

"O Byelorussia's village women wise!
Respectfully before you I bend low..."

Nil Gilevich has mastered many genres: his lovely octaves are endowed with delicate musical lyricism and are often of a definitely philosophical tenor; his humour, at times very soft, can also be sharp on occasions. For his publicistic poetry and beautiful translations of Bulgarian poets into his native tongue he has been awarded by the Bulgarian Government the Order

of Kiril and Methodius. The reader will find in the present collection the poems "Rose Festival" and "Bulgarian Song", dedicated to Bulgaria.

The poet has also written several books for children and some works connected with the study of folklore.

Today Nil Gilevich – Professor of Byelorussian Philology and Honoured Worker of Science of the Republic, First Secretary of the Board of the BSSR Writers' Union, Laureate of the Botev International Prize for Revolutionary Poetry and Publicistics – is in the prime of his creative life and his readers anticipate with pleasure the appearance of his new poetic works.

L. CORTES.

The tree of your poetry, with pearls for fruit,
In your dear native soil has taken root;
Caressed by the sunshine in these lovely parts
It blossoms to gladden and warm the hearts.

From the translator.

OCTAVES

* * *

My forest green, my native forest blue!
For me you are unique, inviting, fair,
My dearest nook, my pines and birches too,
My own myst′ry that I with no one share.

May you for good be blessed, o forest mine!
You know alone, my silent friend and true,
How happy I, your guest, have been with you,
My native forest green, and blue, and fine!
1961

* * *

In that far village where I have never been,
And where to look for it I do not know,
There′s a little hut in dreams I′ve often seen,
Fine, leafy apple-trees around it grow.

As soon as night falls there, I, time and again,
Walk like a phantom through the grasses green;
I seek till dawning the cherished gate in vain
For in that village I have never been.
1961

* * *

Forsake me not, my tender sadness, please.
With you I love – when evening is not far –
To walk and hear the soothing noise of trees
Until the dark lights up its first shy star.

The clouds, like rambling thoughts, are on the way
To where anon the sun will go to sleep.
The shades of evening through the forest creep…
Forsake me not, my tender sadness, pray!
1961

* * *

I love you, Life, I love you well and dearly;
I am no parasite who's born to live
And take his pleasures and enjoyments merely,
I on the contrary am glad to give.
By deeds of mine this love I try to measure;
And when the moment comes my death to view,
I must be sure that all I have and treasure –
To the last drop – I've given, Life, to you!
1962

* * *

I stroll admiring your landscapes truly fine
And whisper on and on: this country I adore!
All cherished hopes, and love, and daily cares of mine
I've brought you here again as many times before.

If I'm fated to go on journeys long anew,
I'll be back to stay with these maples soon or late.
Amid the grove or in the valley now I view
I'm certain as a blade of grass to germinate.
1962

* * *

Had it not been that indignation fair,
That wrath of both offence and love sincere,
I would have never known nor seen – I swear!
How really lustrous are your eyes, my Dear.
        I′d have lost, maybe, my soul′s better part
        Just like a rascal spending strength in vain...
        Had it not been for your fair wrath – ′tis plain –
        I′d have ne′er viewed your image with my heart.
At last I see you, my ash-trees green, anew,
And I have long been dreaming to be here
To bow, my precious, faithful friends, to you,
And then to follow those former traces dear.
        Within your shadows her laughter soft and sweet
        Still echoes strolling – I recall it oft...
        Once more I have come to these parts to meet
        Among you, ash-trees, her laughter sweet and soft.
1963

* * *

The still I can never trust,
What lurks within it I know:
Of the wind a trivial gust
Into a tempest may grow.
And when the thunder I hear,
I′ll break and drop like a live.
D′you think a tempest I fear?
′Tis the still. The still, you see.
1963

* * *

Be silent, willows! You, breezes, do not play
With their slender, lithesome boughs and do not shake
The leaves that rustle so – she dozed off at day –
The babe had kept her throughout the night awake.

And let her dream be undisturbed and fair:
A forest clearing, some softly droning bees,
Hands full of raspberries, a child running there...
Be not so noisy this dawn, oh, willow-trees!
1963

* * *

I crave to return to July, to that Vitebsk suburb evening,
To the flashes of lightning and the pouring rain refreshing,
To the fragrance of orchards, to the flowers well washed, gaily beaming,
To the arms whose embrace was trusty, and shy, and caressing.
The violent rolls of that thunder keep sounding still in my ear,
And the fierce, menacing flame of lightning still dazzles my eye...
Oh, how at some bitter moments of yearning I desire, my Dear,
To return to that eve, to the thunderous eve in July!
1963

* * *

Ripe hazel-nuts, yellow wasps, August divine –
All hindering me in kissing you, Dear;
The first whitish skein of gossamer fine,
Our heads on the odorous grasses half-sere.

Afield, at a distance – a noisy combine,
The rattle of vehicles, the sunshine bright,
On this sinful earth this sinful delight...
Ripe hazel-nuts, yellow wasps, August divine!
1965

* * *

White are the crystals from heaven descending,
White are the clouds, torn asunder, on high,
White are the pine-trees, snow mantles a-wearing,
White dance the snowflakes as white forests sigh.
White is the quietude, and tender, and frail,
White is the slumber enwrapping shrubs there,
White is the winter – Byelorussia′s white tale...
Why don′t you grant me a snow-maiden fair?
1965

* * *

Here, mid these pine-forests, and groves, and hillocks
which in songs are sung,
Mid these limpid lakes, and rivers, and many a swift
brooklet,
Was born to live and thrive for ever and ever our native
tongue
And a different one you cannot for the world imagine it.
Every sound and every word of it little by little have grown
Together with every blade of grass and floweret on this
earth...
Is it a wonder then that our native tongue has become our
own
Immortal soul? – We here, as well, from the ages′ depths
have come forth!
1970

* * *

Skylarks trill over the evening field
Where the dew already cools the ground,
And where the golden ears of rye yield
God′s fairness and splendour all around.

Glad we would be, darling, you and I,
From our mad age to snatch a twinkling
To hear with bated breath at evening
The skylarks′ lays o′er the golden rye!
1970

* * *

How terribly sorry some day we shall feel
As soon as we have understood well at last
The fact that we all meditate a good deal
On the future, forgetting about the past.

And nought will relieve us of suffering and pain,
And nothing will comfort us till we are dead.
In one of the books it is said not in vain
That man can′t content himself only with bread.
1970

* * *

You ne′er venture to sing or whisper there
As if you were Eternity′s shy guest;
Probably it is some burial-mound where
The sacred bones of ancient poets rest.

If you are loath to waste your fleeting day,
You sorely need a temple of your own
Where voicelessly a-weeping and alone,
Without daring to speak or sing, you stay!
1970

* * *

How grievously, woefully a lonely cuckoo cries there,
In that forest, at twilight, the honey-scented night meeting.
Wherefore is this sorrow profound in the month of May
fair?
Wherefore is this sad and so openly orphan-like weeping?
Stay in the hut, ye friends, while to stand outside I′ll be
glad,
Do not mind me, please, have your supper, and drink,
and make merry;
Someone, indeed, should hear the cuckoo cuckooing very
Protractedly there, in that pine-forest–her cry is so sad!
1970

* * *

Across the woods in hoar-frost clad, at dawn,
The sunny rays creep slowly and with care,
Afraid to stir the wonder that was born
In secret by the artist′s talent rare.

But here a branch is touched by cautious rays,
Disturbing green pine-needles, wrapped in calm;
It is enough a silver whirl to raise
And to destroy the realm of peace and charm.
1970

* * *

As heedless and light-hearted as a child
At morning, to myself to adulate,
By pieces of good luck at times beguiled,
I thought I could accomplish something great.

And now in debt I am, a debt unpaid.
Thus, when the evening is not yet quite done,
The thoughts my head persistently invade
How to become again a heedless man?
1970

* * *

That's the truth as ancient as the world:
Happiness is ever sorrow's pair,
Disbelief is traced by prospect bold,
Joyfulness is followed by despair,
The find – by the loss's burning pain,
Love's ardour – by bitter parting cold,
Admiration – followed by disdain –
That's the truth as ancient as the world.
1970

* * *

Into wreaths 'twas woven and much glorified,
Sometimes made fun of and even disdained,
But silently blooming in fields far and wide
The villagers' pet it still has remained.

The roadway that runs through the field of thick rye
Would boring and dull seem if one couldn't view
Mid the corn now and then a heart-stirring eye,
The pretty cornflower eye of bright blue.
1971

* * *

To my grandfather's heritage I
Wish to cling with my soul once again
To my questions to find a reply
How he sought his good fortune to gain
How he hoped from his ill luck to part
And aspired to brotherly unity,
And now he longed, devouring his heart
To raise crops in the fields of community
1972

* * *

And now in the meadows of my Byelarus it is even,
The grasses are slumbering and the trees o'er the rivulet
sigh.
Go also to sleep, my little field flower, and I, like a
heathen,
Will pray for you ardently those shimmering stars and
the sky.
Of you and my Homeland only are my thoughts every day,
every hour,
But now you are too far from me to hear my passionate
prayer,
And I still go on whispering in hope that zephyrs will bear
My words to you, darling: "Slumber sweetly, my golden
meadow flower".
1972

* * *

From my country and you, sweetheart, a thousand miles
away
I enjoy a brilliant daybreak over the mountain line:
The sun rises there, and by him I collate every day
My far homeland's azimuth with that of sleeplessness mine.
Among white acacia, on the asphalt, blackened with rain,
Lies a shining fairy path, lit by the dawning vermeil.
Along this very path – the vision is haunting my brain –
You seem to be running to meet me and happily hail.
1972

* * *

– On the wing of the plane a radiant beam is seen to play
It fell obliquely from the disk of the setting sun.
The clouds below – those pinkish islands – are making
their way
Through the ocean of the twilight-veiled sky, one by one.
My thoughts, like weary birds after a lengthy, tiresome
flight,
For only one moment linger on those fragile isles;
On the airplane′s wing – the radiant beam that fell from
the height...
I will soon behold it gleaming in your evening eyes.
1972

* * *

I know I shall never take again this way
To the crossroad last to meet those days of yore.
Ribbon-like through the field runs the road away,
On that roadway′s sides – only wormwood – naught more.

Fate often gives warning to those indiscreet;
There remain to them bitter mem′ries alone...
The distance dissolves in the midday sun′s heat,
The sides of the road – with wormwood overgrown.
1972

* * *

The sage once said, "If on your back you bear
A certain person patiently and long,
He starts, whene'er asked to get down, to swear,
And snap at you, and speak in terms too strong.

Wise is the sire", went on to say the sage,
"Who always schools his children not to ride
On another's back, if in his old age
He does not want in sorrow to abide".
1973

* * *

My Byelorussian land, I bow to you!
For ever I am yours and you are mine.
I to my bosom press and press anew
Your oak-leaf green as if 'twere drug divine.

For all my songs, and for your good bread too,
And for the joy your noble name to bear,
My native land, with love I bow to you,
For e'er I am yours and you're mine for e'er.
1973

* * *

Where once I learned to plough the land and sow
And where began my verses first to write,
I stand and hear, my temples wholly white,
Asps rustling soft as many years ago.

The leaves a-trembling whisper in my ear
So mournfully, and stubbornly, and low:
"Are you much happier than those who stayed here,
Upon their fathers′ land to plough and sow?"
1973

* * *

Spring. Bitter tears a fresh stump is weeping –
Oh, how the valley mourns the tree′s sad fate!
Quick ants, warmed by the sunshine, come creeping
The funeral feast in haste to celebrate.

This stump a leafy maple used to be;
It sheltered us, Dear, from the rain in May.
No, it was not the living splendid tree
That men sawed off – it was my happy day!
1973

* * *

Once in the garden, in dark shadows dressed,
And touched already with autumnal sadness,
Your slender form I awkwardly caressed
And kissed you first then overwhelmed by gladness.

Long after you had hidden from mine eye,
Amid the alley deserted did I stay...
Your little heels were clicking so, and I
Then felt my poor heart would burst or fly away.
1973

* * *

Man would never be Man, too involved to cognize,
With his memory, dreams and his feelings so vast
Had he thus in himself not united the past
With to-day and the morrow to greatness to rise.

Like a tree with its roots in the earth buried deep,
In the azure – its top, in the spring turf – its seeds,
In the past is Man's mem'ry, in the present – his deeds,
And his dreams with esteem – for his offspring to keep.

* * *

The Spring-tide′s entrance the wood is celebrating:
Triumphant now is the verdant multitude!
The oak-tree alone stands numb as if awaiting
The sunny season to give him strength renewed.

It will not do for him to bustle about here,
To join in the glee and also ′gin to sing.
Among them, later than they all, he will appear
To start the gala and say: "Let′s welcome Spring!"
1973

SPRING′S FIRST RAIN

We all expected it both day and night,
Yet, a surprise it was so full of mirth!
It came down then, life-giving, from the height
Dispersing drowsiness, besprinkling earth.

To the tune of many a million string
You in a whisper said and said anew:
"Man, do believe: much good this rain of spring
To crops in fields and to your soul will do!"

* * *

O Byelorussia's village women wise!
Respectfully before you I bend low
For peerless charm that in your accents lies,
For every word I have been taught to know.

To hear you speak is quite enough to feel
Blood, warmed by joy, run swifter thro' my veins;
Do sit with me and talk a while to heal
My heart of what distresses it and pains.
1973

* * *

She gave me of home-made kvass a full jug:
"Taste this cooling drink from the cellar just brought."
Little twins by her legs did babble and sport,
And tried at the hem of her gown to tug.

She caught them, raised both as high as she could,
And, whirling about, kissed one and the other –
Happy the children and happy the mother,
Cooling the kvass, and delicious and good!

TO PIMEN PANCHANKA[1]

Village. Fine morning. Lovely June has just begun.
In memory revives this distant boyhood scene:
Smoke curling from the chimneys, beneath the kind sun
Cows grazing on the grass dew-sprinkled, em′rald green.

So prickly is the dew – it makes you want to run,
So bright-blue is the sky that it appears even
To be o′erblued. The morn, like childhood, is full of sun
And truly Byelorussian like the grin of Pimen!
1973

* * *

We shouldn′t seek, darling, for fleeting fortune – no!
To catch it we shall never even try.
Of all desired things that in the world we know
For only one we both beseech the sky:

Let not our feeling fade until the day of death
So that no sharp and unexpected turning
Of life, no blows of fate, no evil′s freezing breath
Could blow love′s flame out in our souls burning!
1973

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[1] Pimen Panchanka — a well-known Byelorussian poet.

* * *

Hail to you, oh, limpid forest lake,
Here in the sunny setting lying!
In front of me so broadly smiling,
To sheer delight my soul you awake!

Both fatigue and worries of the day
Hind'ring me in noting things around,
As if of scared wings a flapping sound,
At once from me fly somewhere away!
1974

* * *

The old melodies heart-stirring, ever living,
Whose softness touch one's being to the core,
To-day your children do not consider thrilling –
These savage rhythms – 'tis what they do adore.

The hearts go crusted with rhythms so wild and shrilling,
And I oft think by chagrin gripped to tears:
Will those melodies, the souls with magic filling,
Enchant some time those who are green in years?

* * *

So many mistakes I have made in my day,
They are all such great sins – I know well.
Whatever I'll do and whatever I'll say
My life's path leads me surely to hell.

If the good Lord in heaven could only know
What I suffered through all those mistakes,
He'd say, "Man, to Eden you're worthy to go
To be held in an angel's embrace!"
1974

* * *

Over the world the tango flowed...
And here, gripped by agitation,
I caught in those strains sweet and old
Sad notes of our separation.

Oh, how my heart was wrung with pain!
It madly beat, and I went through
Our grievous parting once again
Although we'd never met – we two!
1974

* * *

If you′ve lost even a single native word,
It infers some other thing you haven′t preserved:
Probably ′tis of your conscience a small bit,
Or an atom of your wisdom, or a whit
Of your memory, or possibly a jot
Of your truthfulness, or frankness, or what not...
I don′t know what it may prove to be – not I!
Ask your mother – she may give you a reply.
1974

* * *

Ever hastening, running, flying here and there,
We to walk upon earth, it seems, no longer care.
The wheels carry us on with velocity dire
Past the brooks that to murmur and plash never tire,
Past the birches atop a low, grass-covered hill,
Past the warblers whose songs all the neighbourhood fill...
And, thus, past our happiness we constantly fly,
But when shall we think at last: and wherefore? And why?
1974

* * *

She is fifteen, so am I. On the plank we stand.
Off she kicks her shoes, and as the wavelets blue
Rock the plank she, so as not to fall, grips my hand
And lets the cooling spray her bare feet bedew.

And then... And after, "Cheerio!"– Along the strand
She slowly walks without me. For some time
Her clear footprints I survey upon the sand
As if they were the lines of my first rhyme.
1974

* * *

You will appear. I know some day we'll meet
And that, no doubt, will happen at the time
When all the earth beneath the stars sublime
Will hold its breath in expectation sweet.

I'll see you flash amid some field or dell
And then go out as if you were a star.
I'll, yet, descry your aspect from afar
And come to know both paradise and hell!
1974

* * *

A poet is a dreamer – it is true.
Things he invents, but they are ne′er vicious.
He strives for truth, and good, and justice too,
Doing to no one anything malicious.

And in illusions sometimes he believes,
In dreams of happiness spends many years,
Succeeding not in gaining it he grieves,
But at himself alone the poet jeers.
1974

* * *

– Look how nicely the willow-tree is cloaked in snow!
– Then it did not snow in vain all night long, you mean?
– Look, the willow in silver makes a beauteous show!
– Then with this silver trimming it looks like a queen.
– Look, how light it endures its heavy, white gown, though!
– Then no burden for it is this ornament sheen.
– Look, the willow has cracked – the echo′s heard around –
And, breaking in two, the tree drops dead to the ground.
1974

* * *

A hundred years you′ve waited for this meeting
And panted after these eyes and their light
Believing there will come at last this evening
And hoping there will be at last this night.

A hundred years it is for these lips you′ve pined,
Looked forward only to these hands′ caress...
But what, what is it that now weighs on your mind?
Foresee a hundred years of new distress?
1975

* * *

The poet and the physicist – these two
In some respect a similar pair make:
The poet′s soul is a reactor too,
Who radiates the particles of ache,
Directed at the heart of man, and who
Goes operating without any break
So that the energy of human conscience
Could be by nuclear fission set in motion.
1975

* * *

Wherever you look, you can behold rows and rows
Of airials over the roofs – in each home a screen
Is shining. Stubbornly you watch all TV shows,
Comfortably seated in an armchair within
Your walls, like a free-will captive, and repose
Reflecting on the recent happenings that in
Far lands take place, and on the dramas that befall
Them, but how your neighbour lives you know nought at all.
1975

MY BROAD DAYLIGHT

Once on the brink of mute despair
I stood, my soul o′erfilled with night.
Not able weeping to forbear
I thought, "No more I′ll ever write!"

My native word – strength regaining –
The chill within my bosom thawed;
My faith in this good word again
Began to shine like daylight broad.
1975

* * *

From all the endless fields, and forests, and vast meads,
Along the gutters and many a river bed,
Along the ruts and cannals, water ever speeds
To meet its doom – the water living, but not dead.

What is the matter? Your heart is madly beating!
And you cannot retard its throbbing to take breath...
The blood of life, the earth's blood not dead, but living,
Runs to the universal ocean – to its death!
1975

* * *

Pray descend on us with quiet, wrap in softness, evening
dear,
So that none should scare away the bird of our fleeting joy;
To my nook this bird came flying to stay just a while here,
Our happiness till dawn or only midnight we'll enjoy.

I'll think, perhaps, tomorrow: "Where does it go on flitting
Flapping pinions young, impatient? Where does our birdie
fly?
Pray descend on us with quiet, wrap in softness, dear
evening,
Do not drop a starlet chancely down from the darkling sky!
1975

* * *

You wonder why I′m so grateful to you, why?
For starry light that on the forest shone
For us illuming the roadway from on high,
And for the path on either side o′ergrown
With shrubs – it wound and wound like drunk – you and I
Could feel the dewdrops′ chill, the chill unknown
To us before – those drops down my cheeks roll still,
However, I wish not to rid of their chill.
1975

* * *

Do not speak evil of that young woman – pray!
Speak not about the one you do not know.
She′s as clear-eyed and beauteous as a fay,
All strewn with downy, resplendent flakes of snow.

Do not speak evil of that young woman – pray!
You may profane the whole of womanhood.
She′s come to love until her dying day,
Not to distraction, but truly and for good.

BULGARIAN SONG

Turn black, turn black, my sister leafy wood,
We both shall turn black on winter′s threshold.
Upon the leaves you′ve lost you sadly brood,
And I deplore my years, my years of old.

My sister wood, you will have leaflets new
And green they will be too when spring comes back,
But never will my years return anew,
For ever gone they are, those years – alack!
1975

* * *

You have not a single little thing, you say,
Just as a souvenir of that meeting,
But if no other ties remained of the day,
Why should you go about it still grieving?

And only what excites you with keen gladness
From yesterdays the whole of you sweeping
Or fills your heart and soul with blissful sadness –
Only that in memory′s worth keeping.
1982

* * *

Songs of Nature do not displease the ear;
No singer is the raven, yet, when Spring
With all its radiance and fair blooms is near,
He does not croak, but tries his best to sing.

He pours his heart in wait for sunny days
Foreseeing treats and joys of Springtide nice...
False notes so disagreeable are in lays,
But Nature is devoid of such a vice.
1982

* * *

They fell the undergrowth to thin the shaggy wood:
The fir-tree and the pine, the birch-tree and the oak...
Before the fire consumes those living trees for good,
They, burning, spread around a black and pungent smoke.

The wood will be a park according to the plan;
It will be orderly, looked after, very clean,
And thin it will be, too, perhaps, to please some one
Who likes it better such than what the wood has been.
1982

* * *

In late bloom the nut-tree at the edge of the forest stands
Wearing the springtime's gift – many a golden earing.
The forest elder, the oak, stretching its branches, like hands,
Thinks its thought of the thunderstorms' season a-nearing.

Among the thick bushes and beautiful nut-trees in curls,
As soon as the time of harvesting came every year,
The twitter of children, the chatter of youngsters and girls
The oak-tree heard, and all this it longs again to hear.
1982

* * *

Happy spring-tide enjoys itself with zest
Singing many a sweet and cheerful lay,
And each contains one and the same request:
"Hear us, oh, Man, in all those voices gay."

Upon the water, earth and in the air
Spring is heard to twitter, whistle, bubble:
"Man, hear in us yourself, of else – beware!
You shall very soon get into trouble."
1982

* * *

Our ancestors composed songs and rhymes
And also wrote many a good story
That bear still to the wide world in our times
Of their native land the light and glory.

If you, bard, want a lesson – here is one:
Try to sing to gladden your homeland dear
And warm the hearts as if your songs were sun,
Your singing then the whole wide world will hear!
1982

* * *

On bushes′ dark branches still bare and wet,
But rousing already from slumber, one views
A-quivering raindrops – those tiny, sheen jewels
Which seem to beseech: "Pause, you won′t regret!
Ignore for a while your worries – ignore!
Do look at this marvel your eye to delight.
If sunbeams within us weren′t flashing so bright,
For you mere moisture we′d be – nothing more."

ON THE MOUND OF SAND

On the mound of sand which the yellow blooms hide,
In a mass grave the children of partisans lie.
O′er these lovely flowers golden-hued and big-eyed
I watch my far childhood′s noisy bumble-bee fly.

We liked to come hither, to this very spot,
Used to laugh, sing in chorus and at times to weep...
Our laugh was made ashes, our songs were all shot,
And that weeping alone in my heart I still keep.
1983

BREAD AND MUSIC

An ordinary straw... Yet, gladly you′ll hear
Its dulcet voice! But singing it began
A while after it had held o′er earth its ear
So that the sun should ripen it for man.

Philosophers and poets, ever musing
On what may be the dearest thing, have said:
The sweetest in the world is bread and music,
The most desired – as well as music – bread!
1983

INSTEAD OF A PRAYER

I beg my happy star if there is one,
To let me not a single moment be
At peace with wrong until my days are done,
At peace with ill the while I hear and see;

Nor let my soul become of gnomes a slave,
But make it stir and in rebellion rise.
May fierce thunders and lightnings in it rave,
Rave like a rampant storm within the skies!
1983

SELECTED POEMS OF DIFFERENT YEARS

I WAS HASTENING AFTER YOU…

I was hastening after you
Sadly peering into the distance
In the morning serene and blue
– Where are you, my love, at this instant?

Roadless, pathless was then my way
I walked, ran along and then rushed thro′
Blizzards, and rains, and vapours gray,
And no obstacles ever I knew.

Forward I went devoid of fear,
But my way might have been not so long:
A far-off echo reached mine ear,
The echo only, but not the song.

To-day I feel both strong and bold,
My resolve is as firm as ever:
I won′t stop searching the whole world
Until, at last, I′ve found you somewhere.

From end to end beneath this sky –
Even though it may take me quite long –
Not after the echo shall I fly,
But after the song, the magic song!
1956

* * *

And the waves, and the wind, and the clouds on high,
And I stand at the wheel, and have no time for sleep...
Oh, my bright, joyous dreams, youthful dreams which
I Still with fondness and care in my memory keep.

In the violent wind on the lone shore I stand,
Old yearnings arising in my soul like a flow
For the things elevated, beautiful, grand,
For the things that I lost, how and when – I don′t know.

I am glad that the everyday cares of mine
Have not ruined those sweet and inspiriting dreams,
And my heart ′gan again to throb and to pine
For the distant horizon that′s boiling, it seems.

* * *

Ethereal as a cloudlet,
In stylish slippers shining,
Ditty-like and delicate
She down the steps came running;

Then paused upon a knoll small
And thus cried out in wonder:
"Ah, how marvellous is all
Around, above and under!"

Say, how happiness so great
A heart is able to hold
If a month remains to wait
Till one is sixteen years old?

To the girl I gave a smile
Just out of mere sincerity.
"Ugh, so wrinkled!" in a while
Said she with frigidity.

"What a shame to be very
Ponderous and lumbering!"
And she, jovial and merry
Thro′ sunlit streets went rambling.

Ethereal as a cloudlet
In shining slippers black,
Ditty-like and delicate –
Not my coeval – alack!

THE SONG WALKED THROUGH THE FOREST

Soft twilight its quiet did lay
Upon the tall pines sleep-cloaked.
To meet me from far away
A song through the forest walked.
That was an early eve′s hour
When in the thicket ′twas heard;
with its young, unwasted power
So deeply my soul it stirred.
And one didn′t have to marvel
Why the song felt quite at ease:
Her heart′s mystery novel
None could hear but the trees.
Now to reveal her mystery
She wasn′t at all afraid there
And desired with every tree
Her inmost feelings to share.
Behind the shrubs, like one dead,
I watched her walk in no haste,
A flowery wreath on her head,
Thick tresses reaching her waist.
The song was holding a pair
Of summer shoes in her hand
To feel beneath her feet bare
The evening coolness of land.
And thus did she skip along
The forest pathway, and I,
From that fair and youthful song
Could not tear away my eye.

The shades of night approaching,
She still continued to roam.
I kept breathlessly watching
Her walk mid the pine-trees home.
1960

* * *

With every year I value more
Your gift unequalled, Spring-tide gay,
The gift each blade of grass pants for
The heady vigour of your May.

Still more and more I long to hear
The little bell ring in the skies
And watch a snowdrop frail appear
To feast on it my eager eyes.

I drink the fragrance with my heart,
The fragrance of your blossoms first,
Afraid that I from you shall part,
Not having quenched in full my thirst.
1960

* * *

Keep on rustling, ye birch-trees,
Keep on rustling above me,
Soothe, delight and lull fondly
With your sweet, age-old tune.
I shall lie for a moment
By the ancient, broad high-road,
On the newly mown grasses,
Fragrant grasses there strewn.

I shall lie for a moment
By the ancient, broad high-road,
With my head on the hillock,
On the mound's verdant side,
With my arms sore and heavy,
Spread, like wings, widely, freely,
And my feet – towards the valley
For the thick mist to hide...

Keep on rustling, ye birch-trees,
Keep on rustling above me,
Lull the earth with your fondness
As it soothingly flows...
I shall lie for a moment
By the ancient, broad high-road,
I am sleepy and wayworn
For a while I shall doze.

* * *

How you were thundering and roaring,
My stormy, darksome, summer night!
A hundred-winged, strong wind blowing
Upon the vale brought down its might.
It seemed the thick of heaven, breaking
And crashing, fell onto the earth,
My heart, however, swift awaking
Off cast its drowse and filled with mirth.
The lightnings flashed and darted flaming,
Their arrows flew across the sky.
You never guessed where they were aiming
Those blind and furious shots on high.
With golden spears a-perforating
The vault of heaven far and wide,
The lightnings roweled the rain pelting
Whose torrents like the waves did chide.
Just like a youngster on returning
From distant regions to his sweet,
The pouring rain was also longing
The thirsty lips of Earth to meet.
Oh, night of fierce thunder and lightning,
You seemed to shake the universe!
I wish you knew how swiftly, lightly
My drowse you helped then to disperse!
Come down once again at parting's hour,
My stormy night, and hear my plea:
Let your thunder in heaven's high bower
Peal madly and – a swan song be!

* * *

Monotonous, and pitiful, and sad
A birdie′s whistle is amid the trees.
To shun the city hubbub, very glad,
I lie in grasses, hidden from the breeze.

Persistently the little warbler′s lay,
Its strains bearing of grief a certain sign,
Awakens in my heart a wish to stay
In this secluded, cosy nook of mine.

I see: a maiden suddenly appears
A-carrying of blooms a torch bright-blue;
She noiselessly my lonely shelter nears,
And here a forest fay I seem to view.

So, springing to my feet at her I stare;
Methinks a phantom marvellous I see.
"Aren′t you a fay?" I ask the vision fair,
"No, I′m Zosya", she calmly answers me.

And on she walks, but I can hear no lay –
The bird has fallen silent. In the grass
Again I lie. What have you done, oh, fay?
You′ve scared away my fairy-tale – alas!

I watch the heavens′ azure, hushed at once,
And hear grasshoppers′ chirring close at hand.
Ah, how one needs to find oneself by chance
Among the magics of some wonderland!

ROSE FESTIVAL

As if some wondrous duty doing
I chose my route without delay:
To that domain of roses blooming,
To Kazanlyk I took the way.
Thousands and thousands of roses fair
I saw around – both red and white,
And loudly sounded the brass bands there
For all to hear and take delight.
And crowds of noisy folk kept walking
Past those luxuriant plants in dew
Remorse forgot, they went on plucking
Sweet-scented blooms of varied hue.
I could then govern myself no more
And reached for buds exhaling joy,
But stopped – it seemed they did implore:
"Oh, don't destroy us! don't destroy!
To ruin the beautiful? – God forbid!
It won't lessen your sorrow – nay!"
Ah, please, my roadway, 'tis you I bid
To lead me from this spell away!
And take me, roadway, take me quick to
My native parts, its woods and groves,
And there I'll walk the thicket blue,
And find me a wild growing rose.
I'll pause before it, bowing lowly
And say: "My love – to every bud!"
Forgetful of precautions, sorely,
I'll prick with thorns my hand to blood.

* * *

For you a song I composed with zest
Maturing it line after line.
To burnish the verse I was trying my best
So that the song should be fine.

My thoughts elevated, cherished quite long
I strove to impart to each line,
And dreams of my own I wove into my song
So that the song should be fine.

And forests, and copses, and oak-groves fair,
And birch-trees – these darlings of mine
Went rustling for days their beauteous air
So that the song should be fine.

Of raspberries ripe an alluring scent,
The vastness of meadows and sunshine –
This all in my heart, in my eager heart went
So that the song should be fine.

However, anxiety's gripped me of late,
I am full of disquiet and dole:
What if it isn't the song you await
To accept it with all your soul?

* * *

Sing, youthful poets, novel strains,
Do burst with ardour into song!
Unsoothed the planet's pain remains,
Unconquered is life's cry and strong!

Perhaps you're destined to realize
The precept of your grandsires dear:
Upon the wings of song to rise,
For all the world to see and hear.

Sing loud the prophets false to spite
Who hoarsely have begun to caw –
May songs in mother tongues excite
The hearts with notes unheard before,

Do sing your land for e'er to fame
And mind: if you do not grow dumb,
The glory of your homeland's name
Will live for centuries to come!

* * *

The breezes set in motion
Rye-ears both far and nigh.
A waving, golden ocean –
Up to the heavens high.

Mid vastness there expanding,
As far as eye could reach,

The huts, in clusters standing,
Show dark like skiffs a-beach.

The oak-trees branchy and stout,
Qigantic verdant towers,
Are beacons pointing out
The route to casual showers.

The wind goes slightly rocking
The edge of corn so tall
That one seems to be walking
Beside a lofty wall.

The ears of corn never tire,
As 'fore the wind they bend,
To utter that they desire
Their hearty thanks to send

To both sunshine life-giving
And rains dewing these lands,
And to abundance-bringing
Hard-working, callous hands!
1959

RETURNING

These native knolls whereon grey mists are lying,
The yellow birch-tree zone beyond the gravel mound,
The glimmering railways and the train's cheerful sound:
Homeward,
            homeward,
                        homeward now we are flying!
Booths, posts rush by... The locomotive gathers
Still greater speed. Children there wave us a greeting
Smiling happily, and the wheels go repeating:
Homeward,
            homeward,
                        homeward hastening, brothers!
The familiar distance, with lights aflicker,
Opens its arms to me, like a darling, gladly,
And the heart's a-throb, and the heart's beating madly:
Homeward,
            homeward,
                        homeward – quicker and quicker!

MY LAND BYELORUSSIAN

My land Byelorussian, so precious to me,
The hope and reliance of your son!
I'm thanking my stars that today
I can see You grow younger beneath the Spring sun.

Like a dear native song in my soul you dwell,

'Tis you that I most of all treasure.
How sightly's your lake Naroch – words fail to tell,
A marvel's your Belaya Vezha!

I mile after mile wish to walk you all through
To see Grodno, Gomel and other
Lovely towns by which I shall recognize you,
By your song and the tongue of my mother.

From the Bug's clear waves to the Dnieper's pure main
The expanse can be never glanced o'er.
A sister of Russia and of the Ukraine
You are with them in joyance and woe.

I travelled along many roads far and near:
Neither smooth nor too bumpy they were,
But in no place I breathed as freely as here,
Mid your fields with their balmy, fresh air.

My land Byelorussian, so precious to me,
The hope and reliance of your son!
I'm thanking my stars that today I can see
You grow younger beneath the Spring sun.

SPRING

Spring, muffling Warblers′ clamorous choir,
Urged by the skylark′s little bell,
Has flung the winter′s white attire
Into the stream
To make it swell.

The steaming fields in languor lie,
The grass is shooting up anew.
There is more joyance for the eye,
For hands and hearts –
More things to do.

LOVE IS MY DESTINY

Come down like snow on blooms of May,
Come down like thunder from above.
I love – it keeps my fears away,
I′m intrepid because I love.
        No trials ever I dread to meet,
        Let all of them by me be blessed!
        One thing I wish: hear me, my Sweet,
        To know what flame consumes my breast.
I′m at a loss how to restrain
My ardent heart, and I implore:
Do not reprove me nor disdain,
Condemn me not that I adore!
1985

HUMOUR AND EPIGRAMS

SIMPLE METHOD

– Some days ago my doggy′s hair
I cropped too close, and now I fail –
Which is vexing – to make out where
His poor head is and where – his tail.
– Don′t you worry, you′ll set it right,
It is so plain, my girl friend said,
Just pinch his tail, if it does bite,
Then it is sure to be his head.

MODERN TEMPO

To his manager a fellow
In a hurry came one day:
– Please allow me – I beseech you –
To be fifteen days away
For I am going to marry
And my beauteous fiancee
Wants to spend ten days in
Sochi In that fine town by the sea.
– But why d′you ask for fifteen days
If ten′s enough as you′ve said?
– Well, five is just the term for me
To find the girl whom I′ll wed.

WISE SUGGESTION

They were divorcing – wife and man.
In court to argue they began:
Each wished to take of their babes one,
But they had three – what could be done?
At last, to settle this affair,
The wife suggested: "'Twould be fair
To wait a while, my husband dear,
Wait for the fourth babe to appear".

LET S HIDE OURSELVES, DAD!

The boy at the pictures was watching one day
The Indians who their faces were colouring;
The curious boy to his father turned wondering:
– But why should they do such a thing? Can you say?
The father's reply was: – They have such a law
Their faces to paint before going to war.
When early next morning, the boy, getting up,
Saw in front of the glass his Mum making up,
He rushed to his father's room shaking all o'er:
– Let's hide ourselves, Dad, Mum is going to war!

"SISTER"

In the hospital hall
A good-looking girl saw
An elderly woman Who the doctor's smock wore.
– I am sorry, may I
See Drozd Nickolai here?
To this hospital he
Was brought in a fever.

Surveying the lassie
The woman inquired:
– Who are you? – His sister –
The girl promptly replied.
The woman held out then
Her hand to the other:
– Delighted to meet you,
I'm Nickolai's mother.

POLYGLOTS ADVANTAGE

Beside the mouse's hole the cat
Was waiting patiently for luck;
She, watching for a long time, sat,
Then started, like a dog, to bark.
The mousy thought: "I need not fear
To sport a while and run about –
Cats must be far when dogs are near",
And from its hole it ran quick out.
The pussy had her tasty meal
And licked her lips concluding so:
"It helps, however, a great deal
At least one foreign tongue to know".

SMOKE IS NOT THE TROUBLE

– So you decided to divorce your wife
Because it is beyond you any more to bear
Her complicating constantly your life
By smoking hard in bed and poisoning the air.
– Oh, no, my kind judge, 'tis not the real cause,
The smoke I can put up with–'tis not the smoke–nay!

My patience is exhausted just because
She ever uses my poor car for an ash-tray.

«SCIENTIFIC» DEBATE

Two of those who were sitting at table
On a sudden began to debate:
– I'd not for the world believe that people
Could from hairy apes originate.
– As for me I do not care a penny;
I'm a man – it's all I wish to know,
That my great grandfather was a monkey,
I think, is not the cause to feel low.
– Although it may not so much disturb you
And seems not to aggravate your life,
But just think of your dear great grandmother
Being once some gorilla's poor wife!

TWO CROWS

Looking up at the flying jet-plane
Two crows were sitting in a tree.
– No wind can ever overtake it,
Oh, what a speedy bird, you see?!
– Why should you marvel, my dear neighbour,
There's behind it a smoky trail!
You'd fly much swifter, I do not doubt,
If anybody singed your tail!

QUESTION AND ANSWER

– And do you know wherefore my hair is grey?
To put to shame his son the sire groans,
– Because I have to scold you every day
For poor marks at school – see, lazy bones?!
The lad not for a moment feeling shame,
Answers to his father thus for spite:
– But can you tell me then who is to blame
That my dearest granddad's head is white?

TO EVERYBODY – HIS DUE

Unequal are fates of all poets – however,
It's for the folk an appraisal to give:
Some due to their works in the hearts stay for ever,
But some as the heroes of anecdotes live.

TO A PLAYWRIGHT I KNOW

Do not brag of the drama you did create,
Though some theatres to stage it agreed.
The wrong to your family you've done of late
Is the greatest of dramas indeed.

IN WHAT COLOURS TO PAINT?

Neither white
Nor black tints
Will you need –
Better paint in grey.
They won't praise?
But then your soul's peace.
They won't break anyway.

TO THE YOUNG LYRIC POET

In each rhyme,
In each rhyme
He repeats the words sublime:
– Come my black-browed one, come, my Song!
Every torturous night I behold your eyes bright
And your tresses a metre long.
    Of your lips I dream so,
    Nothing sweeter I know;
    On my mouth their honey I feel.
    I walk wakeful and sigh,
    For one kiss of yours I cry,
    Come – relieve me of this ordeal.
Years go by, but his lass
He has not met – alas!
Idle rhymes still crowding his head.
But I′d like to find out
What it is he′ll write about
When to her, at last, he is wed?

THE WAY SHE CONSOLED…

A wife to another one living next door:
– So unhappy I feel and so lone:
He married me – oh, had I known it before! –
′Cause a car and a cottage I own.
– Set your mind at rest and do not curse your lot –
If what you are telling me is right,
It turns out in fact that your husband is not
Such a fool as he looks at first sight.

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